

# BLOGUE

March, 2010

FRONT ROW

BLOGGERS

>Who are they?

>What do they represent  
to the fashion industry?

**BONUS:**

Pierre Bourdieu's, John Fiske's  
and Michael Goldhaber's  
terms deffined!

## DEFROST FOR SPRING

Fashion Blogger Danielle  
Surliuga poses for our best  
ever spring shoot!

US \$4.50 CA \$5.00



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# BLOGUE March



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## Editor's Letter

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I turned on my TV the other day and had quite an interesting insight. I tuned into 'In Fashion', Canada's best known fashion TV show, to get my daily feed on the latest trends from the perspective of the best designers and editors in the industry. To my surprise, hostess Jeane Beker wasn't on her way to interview Karl Lagerfeld this time. Instead, she stood patiently in line to talk to a little girl with wide rimmed glasses, dressed in a slightly weird, yet stylish, combination of a skirt and poncho. While she made her way to talk to the little girl, Jeane turned to the camera and explained to me that the little girl was actually Tavi, a thirteen year-old fashion blogger that has recently gained popularity over the web and consequently attracted attention from the media.

The interview itself was not particularly exciting (possibly because Jeane herself didn't seem very thrilled with the situation) but it got me thinking. This Tavi girl, who hasn't even left high school, was being interviewed by one of the top fashion journalists in the world (with a portfolio of interviews that range from Valentino to John Galliano), in the front row seats of renowned brand Dolce & Gabanna's fall show, while I sat anonymously in my couch. Why?

Not satisfied with my "life is so unfair" explanation, and bypassing my mild jealousy, I decided to explore what exactly is this fashion blog phenomenon and how it impacts the fashion industry.

What I found was that bloggers, with their increasing popularity, are extremely influential, especially in the fashion sphere. Through an informal writing style, they create personal connections with their readers who consider blogs to be an honest conversation and trust the bloggers (Allen, 2009). However, my research also showed that the seemingly friendly and sincere writer could be a powerful tool for fashion marketers.

My initial investigation got me quite perplexed. Is there a shift in expertise from traditional fashion editors to bloggers? Are these relatively inexperienced writers as credible as the renowned editors they share front row seats with? Could this be a threat to the integrity of fashion critique and opinion formation? Do bloggers write their honest opinions or are they biased by underlying marketing influences? Ultimately, how does blogging impact the fashion industry dynamics?

Now, because I care so much for my beloved readers, I cannot leave these questions unanswered. Blogue's spring issue will fill you in with all the hits and misses of the latest blogging trend. Not written by a 13 year old, but trust me, still worth reading!

-Danielle Surliuga

Fashion Blogger Tavi  
Gevinson



Reporter Jeane Beker and designer  
Valentino





# Features



## Blog Vs. Blogue

How fashion-focused Blogs influence the dynamics of fashion publishing and Marketing.

**BLOGGING THE SHOW:** FASHION BLOGGERS BRYANBOY (THIRD FROM LEFT) AND TOMMY TON (FAR RIGHT) JOIN VOGUE EDITOR ANNA WINTOUR AT DOLCE & GABBANA'S FRONT ROW.

What makes you subscribe to my feed? What makes you follow me on Twitter or on Facebook? Why do you go to my blog? What is it about me that makes you come back oh I dunno, daily, weekly, monthly? Why are you keeping track? “ (Bryanboy.com, 2010) blogger Bryanboy asks the readers of his eponymous blog on his march 23rd post.

Among the 142 comments of readers answering to Bryanboy's questions, the most common theme was directness and honesty. His readers clearly trust him.

Bryanboy.com is filled with pictures, videos, twitter news feed from the writer and impressively witty and engaging texts. On the top menu bar, among the many tabs that organize the content, an “advertise” tab is strategically positioned in the far end. On the right side, colorful banners

from the sponsors flash their messages in the hopes of getting some clicks from whoever browses the site. The 19-year-old Philipino blogger gained attention of fashion aficionados after, Louis Vuitton's designer Marc Jacobs, openly declared his admiration for the boy's writing. Since then he has become a common figure in fashion shows and media.

Popular fashion bloggers, such as Bryanboy, have what Pierre Bourdieu would call “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1999). They are familiar with the fashion world and the industry's jargons, they make relevant commentaries about the newest collections, and they dress according to the latest trends. This fluency in fashion attracts a second type of capital, “Social Capital” (Bourdieu, 1999), represented by the blogs' loyal fan-base. Bloggers are therefore rich in

Bourdieu's market economy. But are they richer than say, Vogue editors?

The answer to this question is tricky. Whereas most Vogue editors have their knowledge substantiated by years and years of experience in the field (Anna Wintour, editor of American Vogue, has been in the business for 46 years), they are not as accessible as the less expert bloggers. Yes, fashionistas all over the world trust them and their opinions. Also, their status in the magazines guarantees they have a lot of cultural capital, however, they lack social capital. There is very little interaction between a magazine writer and the reader of an article.

Scott Schuman's blog, [thesartorialist.com](http://thesartorialist.com), has more hits in a day than the amount of Vogue issues sold in a month (Copping, 2009). He claims that blogs became so popular because readers see them as accessible and honest conversations, and less distanced than magazines. This is consistent with the answers that Bryanboy got for his questions in the beginning of this article. It is also coherent with author Clair Allen's allegation that a personal connection between blogger and reader is created due to a perceived "honesty and integrity of blogs" (Allen, 2009)

Blogs, as most online communications, have a sense of community. The interactivity allowed by the comments features, the variety of communicators and the common public space create a digital environment where the reader feels integrated (Wood & Smith, 2005).

Most readers do not consider bloggers' expertise as superior to the magazine editors'. Blog's popularity arises not from the credibility of the information posted, but from

## Terminology

### PIERRE BOURDIEU

**Cultural Capital:** Knowledge that is perceived to be culturally valuable. It is usually gained in the context of formal education, or experience. A lot of cultural capital makes a person able to understand the context and the industry.

**Social Capital:** Not what you know, but who you know. Connections that make you valuable within a field. You can gain social capital with popular culture because it allows your inclusion in groups.

### JOHN FISKE

**Double Focus:** Readers are aware of the social institutions that are behind the production of texts but know how to deal with it. With double focus the readers understands that sometimes a text has to be questioned.

### MICHAEL GOLDHABER

**Attention Economy:** You are rich if you have attention. Attention drives capital but capital does not necessarily drive attention. This allows interesting unknown bloggers for example to become as popular as well established names.

the accessibility and perceived honesty the blogger conveys through the conversational style of text. Readers like the sense of proximity to the 'celebrity' writer, they like to see that someone like them can have their opinion heard and gain status, without the bureaucracies of getting into the industry the traditional, hierarchical, way (formal training, knowing the right persons etc.).

There isn't a shift in expertise, but an increase in sources of opinions. Even if bloggers themselves are not experts, the pool of information they gather from many different sources (including magazines) can be more valuable than one expert alone (Sunstein, 2007).

Thus, to answer the question of who is richer, bloggers and editors are somewhat at the same level. Editors

have the credentials that support the quality of their works (and get them unlimited access to the industry's events and main players). Bloggers, on the other hand, have the interaction with the readers, which grants them popularity, and therefore influence, even though they may lack expertise.

Now, there is an interesting side effect of this interaction that might be hazardous for uninformed readers.

**I**n the current attention economy, “money cannot buy attention”, but attention attracts money (Goldhaber, 1997). Popular blogs, with the massive amount of attention they receive from readers, media and designers (remember the example in the beginning of Marc Jacobs and Bryanboy), are potentially major moneymakers (and this time, real capital is involved).

A positive portrayal of a brand in a widely read blog can be a cheap and effective form of advertisement. Many designers take advantage of the bloggers' passion for fashion and flood them with free goods and event invitations so that their brands can be featured on the posts. This procedure is similar to what happens in sponsored articles published in magazines; only it is cheaper for marketers because they usually don't have to pay the bloggers for the mention.

So far, nothing is wrong with this scenario. It seems like a win-win deal: brands get their publicity and bloggers their free goodies. The thing is, do readers know when a blogger is actually featuring something because it is genu-

inely worth it or when it is in return for a favor?

It is true that the disclosure issue (whether or not the author acknowledges that they are sponsored in some way) is a concern not only for blogs, but also for traditional print media. However, as mentioned before, the bloggers have a deeper connection with their readers. The combination of emotional attachment on online communities between reader and writer paired with ‘undercover’ advertisements may be a powerful sales tool and a danger for ignorant read-

ers. For the innocent followers of the online journal, undisclosed ads are like a stab in the back; someone you trust to be honest, original and somewhat unbiased is actually trying to sell you something.

The situation is better explained by going back to the initial example of Bryanboy. In his website he has

***The concern here is to show that readers have to be aware of the possibility that there might be some underlying interests within the topics or ratings in a blog post.***

clearly defined, different areas for sponsored advertisements and for his posts. He even included a special tab for those who wish to advertise there to apply for it. Yet, his popularity also made him personal friends with many designers. This automatically biases his opinions and hampers the honesty of his writing. How likely will he be to truthfully rate a Marc Jacobs collection after the designer named a purse after him?

The point here is not to say that bloggers are evil capitalists that mercilessly deceive their readers in order to make lots of money. Most of the popular bloggers out there have extremely interesting and original remarks on fashion that are indeed honest and definitely worth reading. That be-

ing said, the concern here is to show that readers have to be aware of the possibility that there might be some underlying interests within the topics or ratings in a blog post. Readers have to make an effort to be informed about the context of what they are reading, about who is writing as much as what is said.

This awareness directly relates to John Fiske's idea of 'double focus' (Fiske, 1991). Basically, Fiske says that the reader needs to know about the underlying ideologies of a popular text but not be limited to them. Acknowledging ideological context, the reader can appreciate the contents of a popular text understanding its biases. This idea can serve to solve the deceit issue by encouraging readers to become informed, to educate themselves, and question the information they access. In this way, they are less likely to blindly fall into marketing traps.

However, according to the American Supreme Court, just asking readers to be cautious is not enough. For that reason, "the US Federal Trade Commission Guidelines will require bloggers to disclose receipt of free merchandising or payment" (Copping, 2009). Bloggers that deceive readers by not complying with the guidelines may be charged with a legal tort suit.

Tavi Gevenson, the 13 year-old fashion-blogger-made-celebrity (thestylerookie.com), has already adopted

disclosure as good practice. In the naïve texts that complement pictures of herself, she always finds a way to mention if a particular brand contributed to the look she wore for the shoot.

Speaking of Tavi, the little girl brings this article to a closing point. The main shift the Internet brings to fashion

communications, especially where blogs are concerned is accessibility. Not only accessibility in terms of readership but also in terms of writing. Free blog providers and ease of access to the Internet means that anyone who is interested can become a blogger. If what you have to say is interesting enough, people will read it, regardless if you are a 13 year-old or a renowned fashion editor. This generates a larger pool of opinions and critiques that can possibly transcend

the traditional biases of the fashion industry. Fashion and trends are now viewed, accessed and commented on by passionate people all over the world that converse through the Internet. With all that in mind, Tavi or Bryanboy can be next year's Anna Wintour and we will all be able to tell them directly what we think about what they have to say.

#### WHERE TO FIND

**Bryanboy:** <http://bryanboy.com> - fashion and current events.

**Scott Schuman:** <http://thesartorialist.com> - fashion and style photography.

**Tavi:** <http://thestylerookie.com> - fashion critique.



TAVI AND DESIGNER JOHN GALLIANO:  
IS WINTOUR'S REIGN OVER?



# Final Note

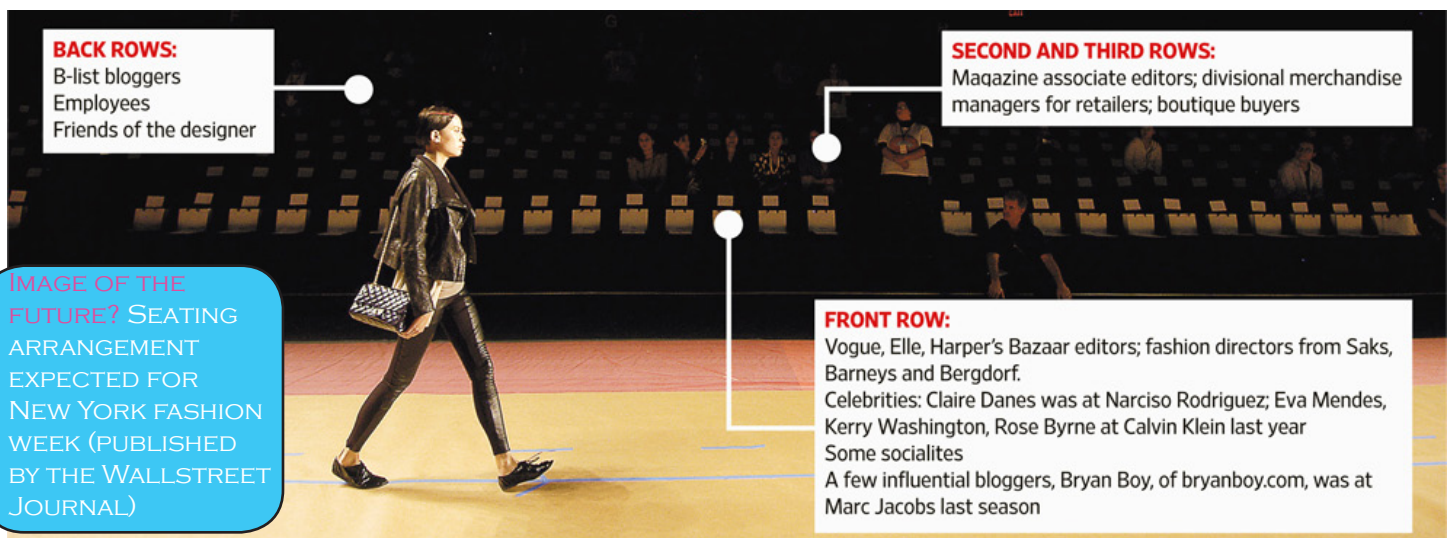
## What Now?

Fashion blogging has become a serious matter. Long gone are the days when they were mere online journals of fashion addicts. Blogs are now part of marketing strategies. Bloggers are as influential as fashion magazine editors. In some cases, they are even becoming fashion editors themselves (Pfeiffer, 2009).

Magazines are also entering the blogging world. Blogs such as Vogue's style.com, become an alternative for magazines to get closer to their readers. With this they can enjoy the benefits of the proximity that bloggers cherish and become somewhat more accessible.

But where is this blogging phenomenon going? What does it ultimately mean to the fashion publishing industry?

While predicting the future is impossible, an educated guess, based on everything that was said so far is fairly viable. The shift that will probably occur in the fashion-publishing scene as a result of blogging is in age. Most likely, with the interchange between media writers, the young bloggers will quickly ascend to the polished offices of fashion magazines and guarantee their spots as writers. Once their popularity is backed up by sufficient proof of knowledge of the field that is. Fashion has always been an industry that values novelty above almost everything else. If something is new and trendy, it has to be adopted. Blogging is the new "in" thing. Bloggers are the new "in" people, the new "in" influencers. Blog is definitely the new must-have item for the seasons to come.





# Style Shoot

## Not So Frozen Fashion

Fashion Blogger from <http://frozenfashion.blogspot.com>,

Danielle Surliuga showcases her style bets for this spring!



Farm Shirt, UO  
shorts, Fashion  
Crimes bracelet.





This page: Farm dress, Zara Belt and  
shirt



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### Special considerations

- All the images not mentioned above are personal property of the author of this magazine. Special thanks to photographer Stephanie Lui.
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# **BLOGUE**

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